



NEWS RELEASE

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1ST BN., 16TH INF., HOSTS VETERANS

By Anna Morelock
Staff writer

The first Soldier to earn the Medal of Honor in Vietnam “subbed” for his brother during recent 16th Regiment activities at Fort Riley.

Retired Col. Roger Donlon visited Fort Riley the week of Aug. 1 because his brother couldn't. What his brother missed was a meeting of the 16th Infantry Regiment Association, of which he is a member.

The association, made up of regiment veterans, met at Fort Riley for several activities scheduled throughout the week, including the return of the 1st Infantry Division to Fort Riley, a Distinguished Member of the Regiment Ceremony, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, Ball and to pass the unit's rich history to the Soldiers of 1st Bn. 16th Inf.

Preserving the history and honor of the regiment is what the association is all about, said retired Col. “Skip” Baker, who was with 5th Battalion, 16th Inf., during Operation Desert Storm. Baker became the newest Honorary Colonel of the Regiment during a ceremony Aug. 2.

After the ceremony, the veterans mingled with “Iron Ranger” Soldiers in the field across from the battalion's headquarters. A group of Soldiers stood around a vet beside an erected camouflage netting shelter as he joked and told them about his experiences during World War II.

Across the field, Soldiers showed their “Iron Ranger” predecessors the gear, weapons and communication equipment they use today.

A “Humvee” rumbled to life in another corner of the field as a veteran started it up. “You're not going to let him drive that are you?” joked the vets standing around the “Humvee” and a WWII-era half-track and Korean War-era “jeep.”

“All these guys walking around looking like trees,” said retired Col. Jerry Griffin, motioning to the “Iron Rangers” in their Army Combat Uniforms, “they are the future of the association.” Griffin, an association founder 17 years ago, said the association is

important because it preserves the unit's history and gives the Soldiers something to belong to.

"Getting together and letting Soldiers know that just because we made history yesterday doesn't mean they aren't writing it now," was the importance of functions such as the gathering in front of the headquarters, Baker said.

Gathered on the hot Kansas afternoon, the Soldiers got the chance to meet veterans and hear stories from World War II, Vietnam and the Gulf War, including some by Donlon.

Besides being there to take the experience home to share with his brother, Donlon met again with Griffin, a friend he first met in officer candidate school.

During his worst day in Vietnam, Donlon recalled, Griffin was the one who showed up with the relief for his unit and that cemented a friendship between the two.

Donlon took home more than just tales from the week-long event to his brother. During the 1st Inf. Div. transfer of authority ceremony, he picked up a special edition copy of Duty First magazine, a quarterly division publication. After the ceremony, Donlon had Lt. Col. Frank Zachar, 1st Bn., 16th Inf., commander, and many of the "Iron Ranger" Soldiers sign the publication.

Donlon said he could just hear his brother's voice telling his grandchildren about the signatures scrawled across the pages of the memento.

About 60 veterans were on hand for the DMOR ceremony and to pass on the history of their regiment during the week.